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Summit test in Sudan

The print was not dry on the joint U.S.-Soviet statement agreed to at the Geneva summit when the U.S. State Department signaled mounting trouble in the Sudan by warning American citizens not to travel to Khartoum and by cutting back the U.S. official presence in the country by 10 percent.

Behind this warning shot across the bow of the Transitional Military Council, which took over in Khartoum after Gaafar Nimeiri's overthrow last April, is deepening American concern that the new Sudanese regime is unable or unwilling to protect the lives of U.S. citizens and officials. Whether the Soviet government, behind the scenes, continues to fuel and exploit a growing anti-American sentiment provides an early test of its post-Geneva intentions.

A stream of notorious terrorists from Libya have been identified freely debarking at the Khartoum airport, including the man who is known to have assassinated U.S. Ambassador Cleo Noel in Khartoum on March 2, 1973. The recent bombing of an American Embassy car luckily resulted in no loss of life but intensified the fear of worse to come.

In spite of official U.S. requests for the deportation of these known terrorists, the well-intentioned Sudanese government has taken no effective action, paralyzed by the dismantling of its security forces and anxious to preserve its new relationship with Libya's Col. Muammar Qaddafi. The limited U.S. withdrawal sends a clear message that Sudan cannot continue to count on extensive American help in dealing with its economy and huge external debt, unless it is prepared to cooperate in protecting American lives.

The current Soviet role in the deliberate destabilization of the moderate regime in Khartoum has many facets and is designed at the least to

deny Sudan's bases on the Red Sea and strategic territory to the United States in times of Middle Eastern crisis.

In Khartoum itself, the disciplined Sudanese Communist Party under Soviet control played a key role in organizing the demonstrations that toppled Mr. Nimeiri and now keeps the political scene in constant turmoil, as 46 political factions prepare for national elections scheduled for next April.

But much more significant is the interventionary role of General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev in encouraging President Mengistu Haile Mariam of Ethiopia to ship Soviet arms and ammunition to the black revolt led by Col. John Garang in the southern Sudan.

Operating from well-supplied bases within Ethiopia, Col. Garang's Sudanese People's Liberation Movement is now strong enough to control the southern third of Sudan. The Soviets have used their influence to prevent the start of serious negotiations that could lead to some form of federal solution between the Arab north and the black Christian and animist south.

By keeping the Sudan weakened and divided by constant civil war, the Soviets serve their purpose of strengthening the position in the region of their chosen instrument, Col. Mengistu, who is about to announce the transformation of Ethiopia into a People's Democratic Republic.

Although the Soviets have provided Ethiopia only 1 percent of the famine relief it has received, they have supplied the Ethiopian army, the largest in Africa, with \$3 billion worth of arms, and 8,000 Cuban troops still remain in the country as a Praetorian Guard.

Having given Col. Mengistu the ideological rationale for his one-party dictatorship and for his forced collectivization of peasant holdings, the Soviets are determined to keep him in power and have used the tribal revolt in Eritrea to make him more dependent on their help. The latest U.S. intelligence estimate sees Col. Mengistu remaining solidly in charge for the foreseeable future through his ruthless suppression of all opposition.

In a tough-minded speech just before the summit, Assistant Secretary of State for Africa Chester Crocker described a serious Ameri-

can diplomatic effort last summer to engage Col. Mengistu in a dialogue that might lead to the termination of armed support for Col. Garang and permit negotiations toward a Sudanese federation. But according to Mr. Crocker, "the Ethiopian leadership, apparently fearful of its Soviet mentors, would not permit any real progress in this direction."

Of all the so-called regional issues that divide the United States and the Soviet Union, from Afghanistan to Nicaragua, this question of whether the Soviets can be persuaded to halt Ethiopian support to the southern revolt in the Sudan is perhaps the least difficult and most susceptible to solution.

If in the improved atmosphere created by the summit meeting the Soviets cannot be persuaded to take this small step toward peaceful compromise, there is no hope of making any progress on the larger regional conflicts.

In a real sense, whether or not the Soviets are willing to help end the civil war in the Sudan is a fair test of whether the summit changed anything.